

CLARK, LINCOLN, AND WHITE PINE COUNTIES GROUNDWATER DEVELOPMENT PROJECT EIS

PROPOSED ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

The EIS will address issues related to the following resources: water quality and quantity, water rights, geology and minerals, air quality, soils, vegetation, wildlife and wildlife habitat, special status species, range resources, land use authorizations and access, recreation/wilderness, visual resources, social and economic values, cultural, historic, and paleontological resources, hazardous wastes, reclamation, noxious weeds, and environmental justice. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resource specialists have identified the following issues of special concern that may be significantly impacted and should receive special emphasis in the EIS:

Water Resources

Approval of the rights-of-way (ROW) application and development of the water pipeline and related facilities implicate various water issues that are a major concern with development of the proposed project. The development of a water pipeline to transport groundwater from rural Nevada to urban Las Vegas, Nevada will be quite controversial and will require an extensive analysis. The groundwater rights to be withdrawn and transported to the Las Vegas Valley through the water pipeline and related facilities will be adjudicated by the Nevada State Water Engineer. However, BLM's analysis of the proposed project will discuss the potential impacts from the development of the water on federal and other water rights in the project area. BLM's decision is to approve or not to approve the ROW application for a system to pump and convey the water approved by the State of Nevada based on resource impacts. Based on the consideration of potential impacts from the pumping and conveyance of water, if BLM approves the project, mitigation and monitoring plans will be developed to reduce impacts or determine if the impacts are as described in the analysis.

There are several hydrologic basins that have been identified by Southern Nevada Water Authority as sources for the groundwater. The potential hydrologic effects of pumping in these basins on water resources both in these basins and in down gradient areas will be analyzed to determine the potential impacts of pumping and conveyance of water to the Las Vegas Valley. The regional groundwater flow systems identified by the U.S. Geological Survey will be considered in the analysis.

Key issues include: 1) Effects of water development on aquifers present in and down gradient of proposed pumping. 2) Effects of water development on the quantity and distribution of surface water in and down gradient of the proposed pumping areas and the potential to adversely affect current uses of ground and surface waters. 3) Effects on the quality of surface water in and down gradient of the proposed pumping areas. 4) Effects on water rights present in the project area.

Wildlife/ Wildlife Habitat

Construction of proposed facilities has the potential to affect wildlife species, such as migratory birds, pronghorn, elk, and mule deer as well as fishery resources and their habitat and will be analyzed. The potential effects of groundwater pumping on water sources, including riparian areas, for wildlife will also be analyzed.

Key issues include: 1) Effects of groundwater development and construction of proposed facilities on species of wildlife and their habitats (particularly key species and habitats). 2) Effects of groundwater development on fisheries and aquatic habitats.

Special Status Species

The groundwater development project could affect federally listed, proposed and candidate species and BLM state sensitive species and their habitat. Potential species of concern include: the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianu*), pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensi*), White River spinedace (*Lepidomeda albivallis*), White River springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi*), Pahrnagat chub (*Gila robusta jordani*), and ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*). Other special status plant and invertebrate species will also be included in the analysis.

A key issue includes the effects of project development and construction on species and their habitats.

Watershed Health

Construction of proposed facilities and development of the groundwater resources have the potential to affect the regional watershed, including vegetation, soil, air quality, and existing uses of the watershed.

Key issues include: 1) Effects of construction and water development on the project area's ecological integrity and biological diversity. 2) Effects of water development on vegetation in and down gradient of the proposed pumping areas, including wetlands and riparian areas. 3) Effects of water development on soils in and down gradient of the proposed pumping areas. 4) Effects of construction and water development on air quality and visibility. 5) Effects of construction and water development on rangeland resources and grazing operations.

Social and Economic Values

Construction of proposed facilities and development of the groundwater resources have the potential to affect local and regional social and economic values in the affected counties.

Key issues include: 1) Effects of construction and operation of facilities on project area's aesthetics. 2) Effects of construction and operation on human health and safety. 3) Effects of construction of facilities and groundwater development on recreational opportunities and the recreational experience. 4) Effects of construction and groundwater development on rural economies and the Las Vegas Valley. 5) Analysis of environmental justice issues. 6) Potential effects of groundwater development on local and regional growth.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources in the project area will be analyzed to determine potential direct and indirect effects of the proposed project.

Key issues include: 1) Effects of construction on cultural resources, paleontological resources, and Native American sites and properties, 2) Effects of groundwater development on cultural resources, paleontological resources, and Native American sites and properties.

Noxious Weeds

Construction of proposed facilities would result in surface disturbance, which could promote the invasion or spread of noxious weeds.

Key issues include: 1) Effects of construction and operation on introduced, invasive or the spread of noxious weeds. 2) The long-term impacts associated with vehicle use and maintenance of roads. Vehicles can further spread noxious weeds. 3) Indirect effects of invasive species impacting overall watershed health.

Wild Horses

The groundwater development project could significantly affect wild horses and their habitat, especially the potential effects of the groundwater pumping on water sources that wild horses rely upon.

Lands

Valid Existing Rights: There are existing rights-of-way (ROW's) in the proposed project area. These will range from water pipelines for stock watering, power lines, telephone lines (buried and above ground), mineral material sites, etc. The

project description will need to identify other parties that either may be cooperators or interested parties, such as the local telephone and power company, or any local agricultural business.

Areas with special management prescription: Along the proposed corridor and when it becomes “just a ROW” in White Pine County, there are areas that currently have special management prescriptions attached. Examples include:

- 1) Swamp Cedars in North Spring Valley. This area is currently protected under the Classification and Multiple Use (C&MU) Act, but will be recommended in the Resource Management Plan (RMP) currently under development as a proposed Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC):
- 2) Rose Guano Cave. This is another protected area under the C&MU that will be recommended as an ACEC in the RMP:
- 3) Sacramento Pass. This area is currently withdrawn for recreation purposes. There may be other areas that will need to be identified in the EIS process.
- 4) Echo Canyon and Eagle Valley Reservoir State Parks. The BLM has an agreement with the Nevada Division of State Parks to preserve the view-shed along the existing State Park administrative boundaries.
- 5) Public Water Reserves under Public Law 107. Several areas are considered preserved “surface water” under this federal law. More often these areas coincide with spring sources.

Access: Access across the pipeline corridor/ROW to private and public land on either side of the ROWs during construction and operations.

Construction: Specific staging areas for construction will need to be identified as well as identification of the use of existing access or new roads that will be constructed.

Visual Resources Management (VRM): Color and style of above ground facilities are very important. An assessment of VRM from key observation points will need to be completed.

Existing Utility Corridors: The Southwest Inter-tie Project (SWIP) corridor, Ely-to-Delta Portion will need to be shown correctly on maps. The corridor begins at Robinson Substation on Robinson Summit to the Gondor Substation (ending at Delta, Utah power plant).

Note	These issues are preliminary and are subject to change throughout the course of the EIS process.
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